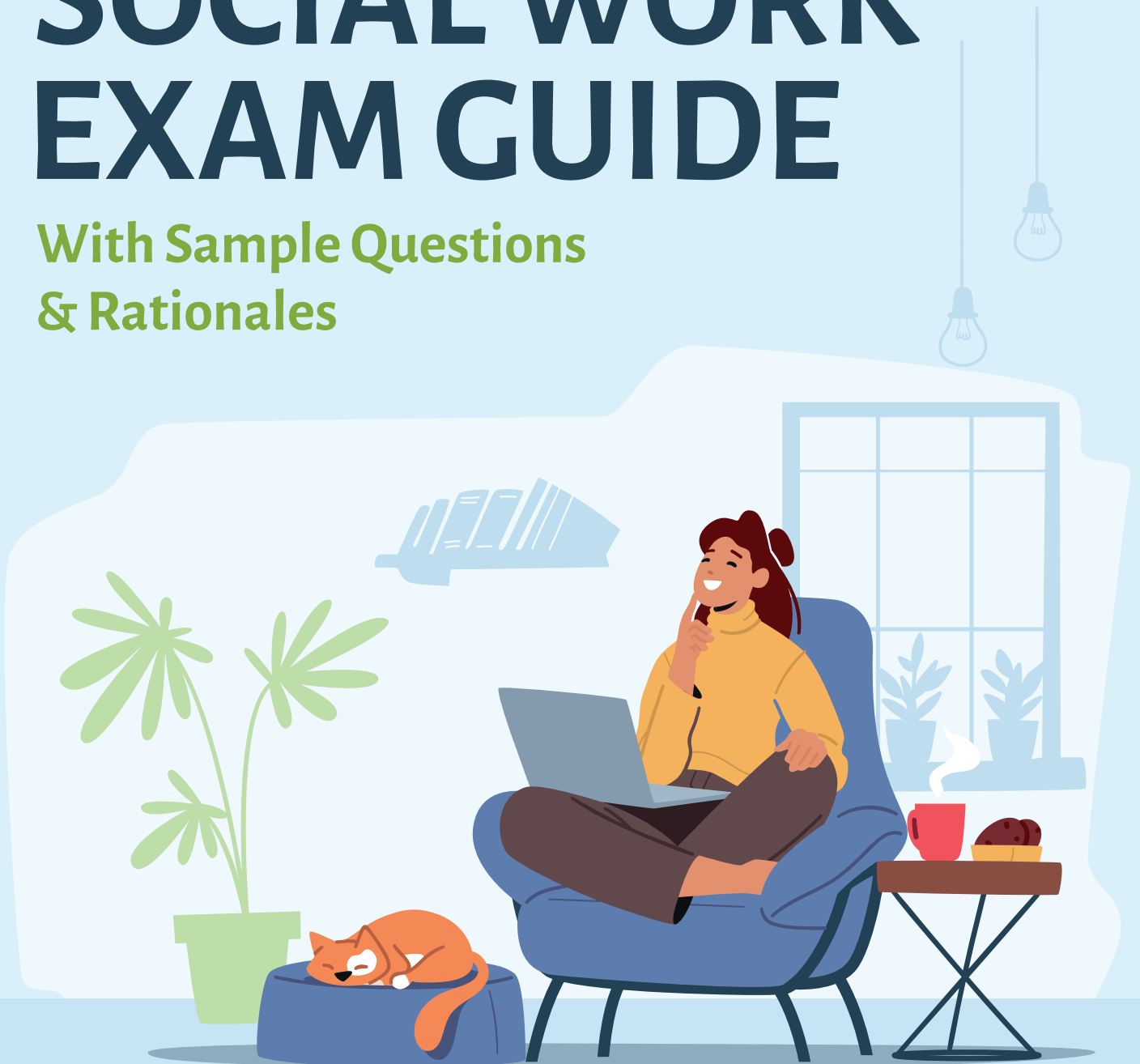




# SOCIAL WORK EXAM GUIDE

With Sample Questions  
& Rationales



# Authors



## Amanda Rowan, LCSW

CEO & Founder of the Therapist Development Center.

Amanda is the Founder of the Therapist Development Center. She used her background in the neuroscience of learning to develop TDC's innovative and highly effective study systems. She believes that by "studying smart," social workers can pass their exams and advance confidently in their careers.



## Heidi Schriefer, LCSW

Vice President of Social Work Programs & Co-Founder

Heidi Schriefer is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in St. Louis, Missouri. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Loyola University of Chicago, a Master of Education degree from the University of Missouri St. Louis, and a Master of Social Work degree from Washington University in St. Louis. Heidi is a skilled educator and clinician with experience in therapy, teaching, training, supervision, communications, and coaching.

Heidi passed her LMSW and LCSW exams on the first try in 2014 and 2016 using TDC's LMSW and LCSW exam prep programs. She is a true believer in the TDC method, having signed up for TDC after using a different popular exam prep program that left her feeling overwhelmed and underprepared. After using TDC, Heidi passed her exam with a 93%! Heidi found TDC's programs prepared her thoroughly not just in factual content, but in the reasoning skills needed to be successful on the exams. She began coaching with TDC in 2015 and is passionate about ensuring TDC continues to be the best, most relevant exam prep out there for the ASWB exams while simultaneously helping people become even better social workers (her favorite piece of feedback from customers). In her coaching role, Heidi is skilled in breaking down challenging concepts into easily understandable, digestible components and empowering customers to understand the mindset behind the exams in order to approach the exam with confidence.

**To learn more about Heidi and Amanda,**  
visit [www.therapistdevelopmentcenter.com/about-us](http://www.therapistdevelopmentcenter.com/about-us)



# Table of Contents



• About the Social Work Exam	4
• Study Tips	5
• Practice Questions	6
• Rationales	8
• What Social Workers Say	9
• How Our Program Works	10



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# About the SW Exams

## Understanding the ASWB



- The ASWB has been developing social work licensing exams since 1979, and every state uses them as part of their licensure process. Their goal is to ensure “minimum practice competency”
- Your test will consist of 170 questions, 150 of which are scored. The number you need in order to pass varies, but it’s usually between 90 and 107 questions.
- Different states refer to the exams and licensure levels differently, so make sure you know which test you should be taking in order to advance your career.

### About the Clinical Exam (LCSW)

- Between 2011 and 2021, 76.1% of first-time test takers passed the Clinical Exam, with an eventual pass rate of 87.7%
- Approximately 85% of the questions on the Clinical Exam are reasoning-based
- The ASWB has the Clinical Exam content broken down into 4 categories:
  - Human Development, Diversity, and Behavior in the Environment
  - Assessment, Diagnosis, and Treatment Planning
  - Psychotherapy, Clinical Intervention, and Case Management
  - Professional Values and Ethics

### About the Master’s Exam (LMSW)

- In 2021, 82.9% of first-time test takers passed the Master’s Exam
- Approximately 65% of the questions on the Master’s Exam are reasoning based
  - The ASWB has the Master’s Exam content broken down into 4 categories:
    - Human Development, Diversity, and Behavior in the Environment
    - Assessment and Intervention Planning
    - Interventions with Clients/Client Systems
    - Professional Relationships, Values, and Ethics

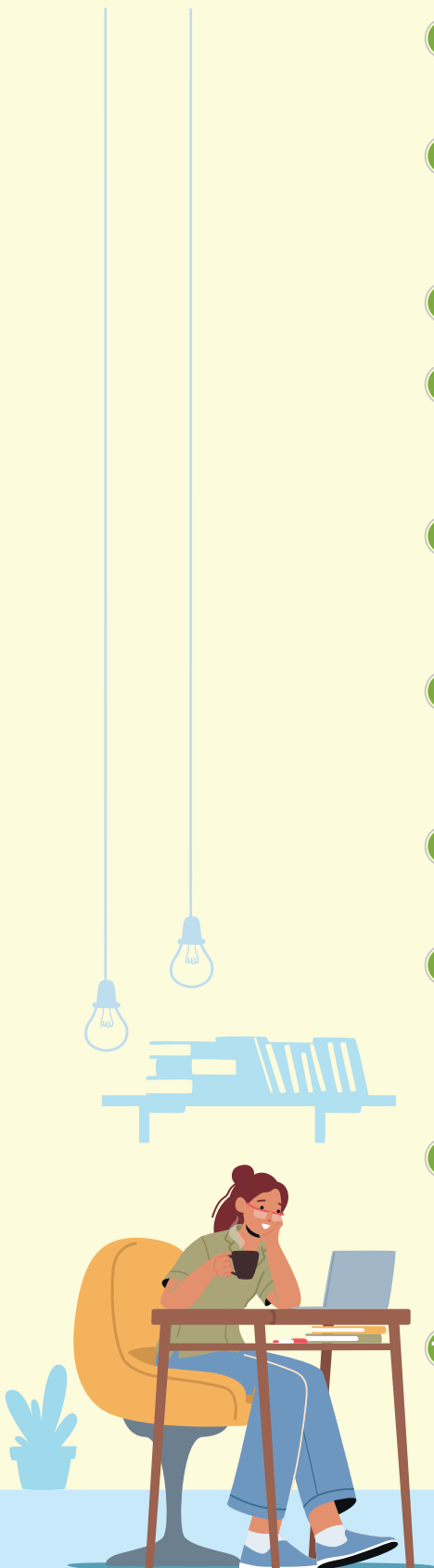


# 10 Study Tips

## For Social Work Exam Success



- 1 Reflect on your attitude about tests - identifying and managing any anxiety is key.
- 2 See the exam as an opportunity to learn. Research shows that exams are the critical tool to facilitate and demonstrate learning. Exams are a measure of the quality of teaching, not just the students' abilities.
- 3 Clear test-taking strategies are the best way to manage test anxiety.
- 4 The social work exam is challenging, but the ASWB isn't trying to trick you. That's right. There are NO TRICK QUESTIONS. With the right tools, you can pass with confidence.
- 5 Understand that the exam is about competence, not of your ability to memorize. Competence is measured through reasoning-based questions.
- 6 A majority of the questions on the social work exams are reasoning-based, so you will need clear strategies to know how to figure out the answers.
- 7 The exam is predictable. There are certain clinical situations that the board will want to be sure you know how to address.
- 8 An organized study plan is essential. Otherwise, you can waste a lot of time "studying" but not actually "preparing to pass." The average person stops learning after 90 minutes, so you won't learn most of what is taught in daylong workshops.
- 9 Not all exam prep materials are created equally. Most study products and workshops are created by people who have NEVER taken the exam. Some aren't even social workers. Be sure to find out whether the authors and instructors have taken the exam recently.
- 10 Being able to talk through concepts and rationales you don't understand is essential to the learning process. Look for a study program that provides access to coaches who have taken the exam.



# Practice Questions

## Get a feel for the LCSW Exam



- 1 A social worker sees a couple who describe frequent conflict and arguments. During a session, the wife tells the social worker that her husband never wants to talk about his feelings. The husband confirms this, but says that when he tries to express himself his wife gets upset and yells at him. The wife jumps in and says loudly, "That's not true! He's always making things up about me!" The husband then says, "See?" and crosses his arms, sitting in silence. The social worker should NEXT:

  - A. Recommend that the husband and wife be seen individually.
  - B. Point out the communication pattern that just occurred.
  - C. Move the conversation to a topic that is less conflictual.
  - D. Teach the couple more effective communication techniques.
- 2 A social worker facilitates an inpatient therapy group for adolescents. One member of the group, a 14-year-old female, has been prescribed medication for a mood disorder and shares that she does not want to take it. The other members of the group identify with the girl's feelings and become angry, yelling at the social worker and demanding that the social worker do something on the client's behalf. The social worker should FIRST:

  - A. Explore group members feelings about medications.
  - B. Bring the conversation back to the client's behaviors that prompted the medication.
  - C. Acknowledge the group members' anger and explore underlying issues.
- 3 A 28-year-old man seeks treatment from a social worker. He reports being dissatisfied with his career, but cannot identify why or what he would like to be different. He also states that he's unhappy about his current relationship, wishes he was in better shape, and can't seem to find a way to change. He says, "Every time I try to change something, I get overwhelmed and end up right back where I started . . . or worse." The social worker should FIRST:

  - A. Assist the client in prioritizing his concerns.
  - B. Identify behavioral objectives to help the client change his behavior.
  - C. Apply a strengths-based perspective by focusing on his strengths.
- 4 A 26-year-old woman is referred to a social worker in private practice by a close friend. During the initial session, the client describes a number of problems, including a recent breakup with her boyfriend, a history of trauma, and almost daily methamphetamine use. The social worker should FIRST:

  - A. Explore the client's reasons for drug use.
  - B. Assess the client's motivation for change.
  - C. Explore the connection between the trauma and the client's current problems.
  - D. Refer the client for a substance abuse evaluation.

# Practice Questions

## Get a feel for the LCSW Exam



- 5 A social worker at a community agency begins working with a family who report frequent arguments centering around the teenage son's behavior. The mother reports that while he maintains good grades and participation on the school soccer team, he is "totally uninterested" in family life. The father then interrupts and states that his wife has "unrealistic expectations" for his son. They continue to bicker about discipline while their son sits silently, rolling his eyes. The social worker should FIRST:
- A. Refer the parents for couple's treatment.
  - B. Suggest individual treatment for the son.
  - C. Concentrate on interpersonal communication between family members.
  - D. Obtain a release of information to contact the son's teacher.
- 6 An emergency room social worker is asked to evaluate a 43-year-old woman who was brought in complaining of heart palpitations and an inability to sleep. The social worker notes that the woman's pupils are dilated and that she is wrapped in a large blanket despite the reasonable temperature in the ER. The client has most likely been using:
- A. Cocaine
  - B. Oxycontin
  - C. Alcohol
- 7 A social worker has been working with a 9-year-old boy and his parents to address emotional and behavioral issues. A psychological evaluation has revealed that the boy has a learning disorder; the parents have requested an IEP from the boy's school, but have had difficulty making contact with the special education coordinator. The social worker's calls to the school administration are not returned. The social worker should FIRST:
- A. Recommend that the family obtain legal representation.
  - B. Request that the psychologist attempt to contact the special education coordinator directly.
  - C. Send a registered letter to the special education coordinator and administration with the psychologist's recommendations.
  - D. Contact the school board about the need for action.
- 8 A client seeks services at a community mental health center. He reports that his chief complaint is that he can't get a job so he is "stuck living in his parents' basement." He is dressed in pajamas with a necktie. He reports that his only friends are people he knows online in an alien tracking club. He asks if the social worker believes in ghosts. What diagnosis should be considered for this client?
- A. Schizoid Personality Disorder
  - B. Schizophrenia
  - C. Schizotypal Personality Disorder
  - D. Schizophreniform

# Answers & Rationales

## Get a feel for the LCSW Exam



- 1 B** Rationale: B is the best answer because the therapist should first help the couple become more aware of their existing communication patterns. A does not make sense because the problem is in the relationship. C avoids the problem for which they are being seen, which is counterproductive. D may be a useful intervention, but not until the clients are more aware of their current communication style.
- 2 C** Rationale: C is the best answer because the social worker needs to start where the group members are and help identify any underlying issues that may be contributing to their responses. B disregards the group members' feelings of anger. A might be useful, but not until the social worker has recognized the feelings that are being expressed and has allowed group members' to process them.
- 3 A** Rationale: When a client reports having multiple concerns and feels overwhelmed, the most helpful intervention is to help them separate and prioritize their concerns (A). B and C may be useful interventions, but not until the client feels more in control.
- 4 D** Rationale: D is the best answer because substance abuse should be addressed first. A, B, and C are all useful interventions, but only after the therapist refers the client for a substance abuse evaluation.
- 5 C** Rationale: The family is demonstrating the communication patterns that are causing their distress, so the social worker should start where they are (C). A and B might be useful later if it becomes apparent that either the son or the parents are in need of focused treatment. D does not really make sense at this time since the son is described as doing well in school.
- 6 A** Rationale: This is a recall question. The symptoms described in the stem are all indicative of cocaine abuse. B and C would both be described differently.
- 7 C** Rationale: C is the best answer because it creates a paper trail that can be referenced in later interactions and ensures that someone in the school will receive the communication. A may be necessary, but attempts to contact the school in writing should be done FIRST. B and D may not do anything to accomplish the family's goal if these telephone calls are also not returned.
- 8 C** Rationale: This is a good example of a diagnosis question. Schizotypal Personality Disorder is characterized by social isolation, odd behavior, unusual dress and thinking, and unconventional beliefs.





# What Social Workers Say

## Who have passed with TDC

“ The TDC program truly helped me pass my exam. It is extremely organized and thorough. All I had to do was follow the instructions. I felt prepared and ready after completing the study process. I felt supported and inspired by the motivational audio sessions. I highly recommend this program for anyone who is taking the clinical exam.”

**-Andrea Cook Basel**

“ I am beyond excited and THANKFUL that I just passed the LCSW exam. I would like to thank the coaches of the Therapist Development Center for their expertise, patience, and support. I highly recommend TDC to social workers preparing to take the Clinical exam. TDC is an exceptional preparation course!!!

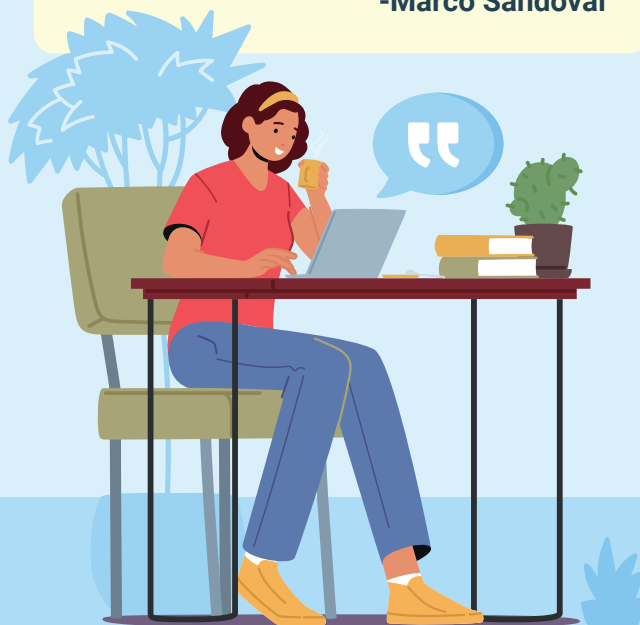
**-Sharice Nance**

“ I failed the clinical exam in 2015. I had used another company's materials and it didn't have an organized way to study. Further, the other company's materials were colossal and overwhelming. Then I found the Therapist Development Center and passed. They are the REAL DEAL!”

**-Marco Sandoval**

“ The TDC study system is by far better than the others I had tried. Others were too involved and too technical. TDC uses language similar to what is on the real ASWB clinical exam and covers the material in a concise but effective manner. The exam strategies and ways to think about the exam were incredibly useful.

**-Lisa Lewis**



“ I took the social work exam two times and did not pass. With English being my second language it had been very difficult for me to study for this exam. Thank God for TDC-their online study program saved my job! I can now say that I'm an LCSW! I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE THERAPIST DEVELOPMENT CENTER!”

**-Ngoneh Gaye-Bullard**

# Study With Us

## Learn How Our Program Works



- ✓ Our LCSW Study System is an online program that you can access immediately once you sign up. Just log in and start studying.
- ✓ We provide an organized, 10-step study plan with handouts, lectures, Quick Study sheets, quizzes, and practice exams.
- ✓ Our Masters prep program includes 600+ online practice questions like the ones in this guide and our Clinical prep program includes 750+ online practice questions..
- ✓ In addition to reviewing content, we emphasize the test taking strategies and reasoning skills you need to pass.
- ✓ We provide FREE access to LCSW EXAM COACHES (who have passed with a score of at least 90%) to answer any questions you have while studying, including whether you are ready to take the exam.
- ✓ We are with you until you pass. Extend or repeat the program for FREE. You only pay ONE time.
- ✓ 95% of social workers pass using our system. For people who have failed using other prep material, scores increase an average of 18 points with our program.



**Study Smart. Sign up today.**  
**Save \$25 with coupon code: LCSWTIPS**

